

DESIGNING A SITUATED CULTURAL LEARNING CURRICULUM FOR DEVELOPING STUDENT CULTURAL FLUENCY

Yunxia Zhu
University of Queensland
Email: y.zhu@business.uq.edu.au

Abstract

Culture is often taught as fixed patterns based on the Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions in our curriculum of cross-cultural management (CCM) education. This reflects the general trend of cross-cultural research and cultural dimensions for understanding cultures (Stahl and Tung, 2014; Zhu, 2015). However, cultural dimensions often represent 'sophisticated stereotypes' that treat cultures as categories, which are often a negative representation of cultural differences (Larkey, 1996; Osland et al., 2006). In addition, these dimensions are only etic (outsiders' views) while the emic (insider's) perspective is missing. In response to this call, Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini (2013) developed a situated cultural learning approach (SiCuLA) based on situated learning (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning is a type of learning embedded in activity, context and culture (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning is especially sympathetic to the emic perspective for uncovering the depth of cultural meanings in internationalised classrooms. As such, I will focus on the following two aspects:

In response to this ongoing issue, Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini (2013) proposed a situated cultural learning approach (SiCuLA) for a balanced emic-etic approach, which focuses on learning by doing in specific social and cultural contexts (Brown, Collin and Duguid, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978) and through constructing meanings from direct experiences (Dewey, 1904). Specifically, Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini (2013) called for more emic research in order to complement the prevalent etic approach and train students to become ethnographers of cultural learning. For example, applying such an ethnographic approach might involve students learning on how to interact with people of different cultures by observing and engaging in conversation within that particular culture.

Yet, although promising, SiCuLA has not yet been implemented in the classroom context. I, therefore, develop an adapted model, and apply it to teaching real-world cases in class. It is used to enhance students' cultural fluency defined as using cultural knowledge appropriately in specific contexts (Oyserman, 2011) and train students' awareness about contextual intelligence (Khanna, 2014).

A case study of teaching management cases in three classes at UQ Business School is used to illustrate these processes. Through a comparison of default and intervened case teaching episodes, support was found for increasing cultural fluency via the exploration of management problems embedded in cultural contexts. Specifically, evidence was that much more attention was given to enhancing student contextual knowledge in the intervened cases through applying the situated learning processes. This finding appeared to be consistent across the three classes involved in this project.

To operationalize SiCuLA, we conducted a pilot study to develop situated curriculum for teaching cases in management classroom. A particular class of management was chosen. Specifically, the model is composed of these processes:

- 1: How to make the context authentic to students?
 - Providing authentic cultural contexts
- 2: What activities are most appropriate for real-world learning?
 - Doing authentic activities
- 3: How to promote deep learning of cultural knowledge?

- Teaching reflexive cultural learning
- 4: What the teachers' role should look like?
- Promoting coaching and facilitation for teachers
- 5: What a learning community should look like?
- Building a collaborative and inclusive community
- 6: What outcomes should we expect for a situated cultural learning curriculum?
- Dual outcome of both management learning and cultural fluency

This is one of the first studies to operationalize a situated cultural learning framework (SiCuLA) in a classroom setting. It contributes to studying cultural contexts as sources of knowledge for learning through active co-participation in a cumulative process involving researchers, facilitators and students.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Learning, Cultural Fluency, Business and Management, Real-World Learning.

